

Documenting Thong Boi language: an LDTC participant's experience (a.k.a. How a non-linguist became LDTC Co-director)

Erenst Anip - Language Documentation Training Center, University of Hawai'i Manoa

LDTC Background

The Language Documentation Training Center (LDTC) was initiated and is run entirely by Linguistics department graduate students in the at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH). Mission:

- train native speakers to document of their language
- provide public domain to make the languages accessible
- inspire native speakers to be advocates in their community

Language	Thong Boi
Other names	Khek, Bangka Boi, Bahasa Bangka
Location	Bangka Island, Indonesia
Speakers	Approx. 300,000 speakers
Origin	A Sinitic language and a variant of Hakka (HAK) that incorporates elements of other languages in the area
Status	7 (Shifting) - EGIDS
Situation	Decline due to urbanization and lack official support from the government



Figure 1. [above] Screenshot of the Thong Boi homepage, [bottom left] Information on Thong Boi, [bottom right] Map of Bangka Island (red circle)



Figure 2. [left] Mentor, Katsuhiko J. Ota (r) with informant (l) [right] Language elicitation through informal group conversation

Language Overview

Thong Boi speakers came from Southern China as tin-miners for the Dutch colonial powers in the late 18th century. Thong Boi does not have its own writing system; instead, as it develops later on, speakers use the Indonesian writing system if needed. Although Chinese culture and language are being revitalized in the post-Soeharto era, there are no publications or reading materials in this language because the language is not considered a major Chinese language/dialect. This is an effort to create interest in Thong Boi language and culture.

Findings & Discussions

1. Motivations to join LDTC:

- ✓ Using Thong Boi language in monthly family gathering in Jakarta;
- ✓ Noticing one's own language attrition in social interactions;
- ✓ Having wanted to improve his Thong Boi but lacking formal education.

2. Involvement and progress in LDTC project

Time		Work Progress
2006	Fall	Explored identity & heritage language; website creation; basic word list; bird story; basic syntax and morphology;
2007	Spring	Refined work on the sections above;
	Summer	Field Work 1: Established a 20-hour corpus of conversations in/about Thong Boi (Funded by the University Research Council);
	Fall	Dictionary – 750 entries;
2007-2008	Winter	Field Work 2: Built a corpus of folk tales and folk songs in Thong Boi (Funded by Associated Students of Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa);
2008	Spring	Documented proverbs;
2008	Summer	Mentor's Visit: Achieved better understanding of the people, language origin, and current state of it;
2008	Fall	Documented folk songs;
2009	Spring	Networked with Bangka Diaspora; Updated program poster for LDTC; Presented a poster at ICLDC 1; Volunteered at ICLDC 1
2009	Fall	Documented sound, tone, and writing system;
2010	Spring-Fall	Added more proverbs with translation and sounds files Made LDTC a Registered Independent Organization, eligible for funding from campus sources;
2011	Spring-Fall	Presented LDTC at ICLDC 2; Became LDTC Co-director;
2012	Spring-Fall	Community outreach: Combined Manoa Experience Day & International Mother Language Day celebration; Started a Facebook page for LDTC; Presented LDTC at Hawaii Pacific University; Worked on potential external cooperation on sign language & cooperation with universities abroad.

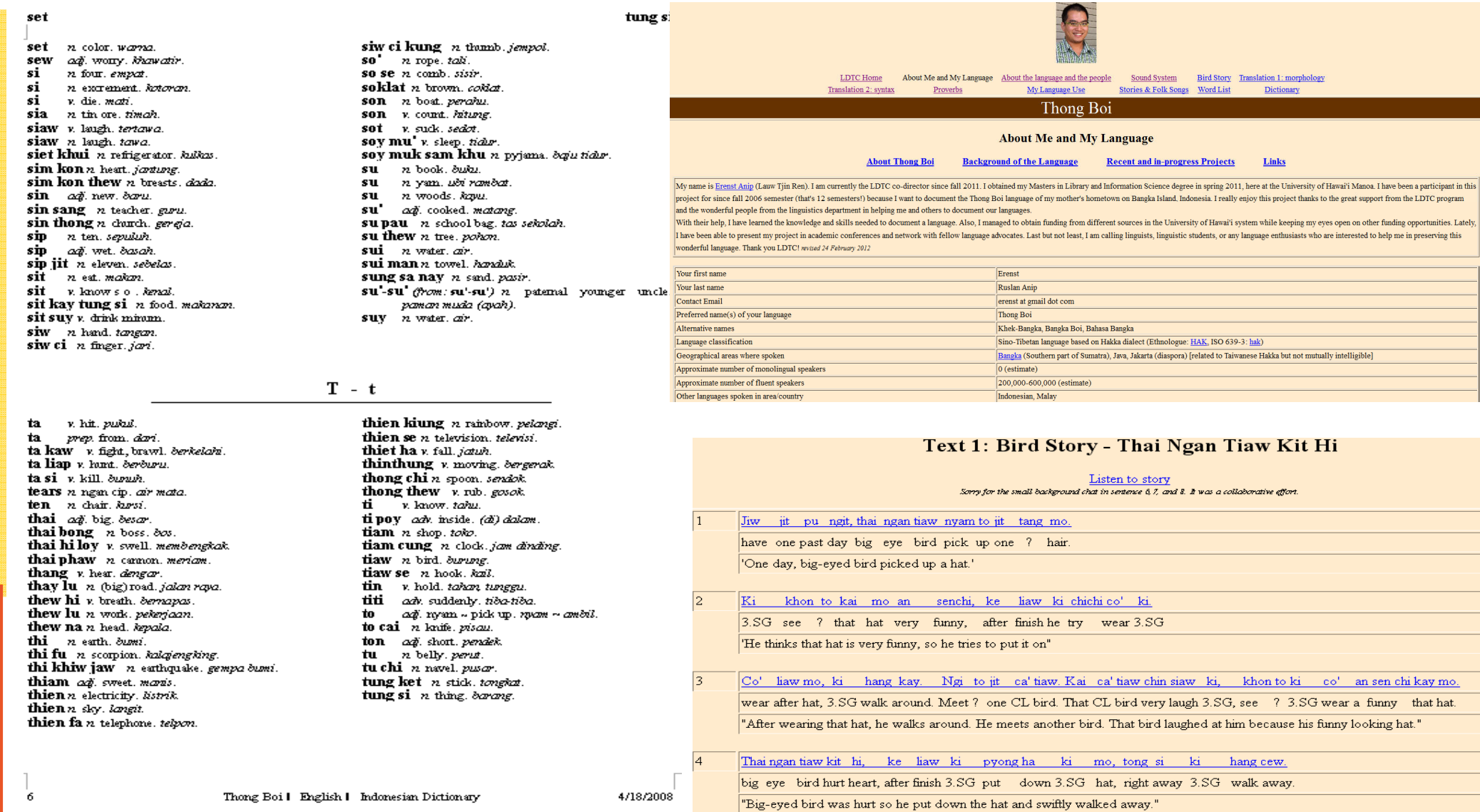


Figure 3. Screenshots of the Thong Boi Trilingual Dictionary and website.

Looking Ahead

As Bangka people emigrate to urban areas and outsiders immigrate, we need to raise the community's awareness about language endangerment. If children stop using this language, it will disappear in two generations. Publishing and distributing a mini-dictionary and short-story compilation to the community is a good starting point.

Heritage language development among Chinese Diaspora can be complicated and challenging when one's language is not the dominant variety (i.e. Mandarin Chinese).

Impacts of LDTC: Language documentation activity creates a precious space for an international student to re-learn his heritage language, to develop his heritage language identity abroad, and to further his vision of preserving his Bangka culture and other minority languages/cultures in Indonesia.

Global Networking for Language Maintenance: LDTC is a good example of how international collaboration between academia and heritage language speakers offers a possibility of minority language awareness and maintenance.

Thong Boi Language Website

<http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/ldtc/languages/thongboi>

Acknowledgments

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